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THE STUDY OF DERIVATIVES AND COMPOSITES AS AN AID IN THE ACQUISITION OF A VOCABULARY

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Of the different methods of acquiring a vocabulary, which are treated in these papers, that making use of derivatives and composites offers perhaps the most extensive field, and at the same time avoids the charge that it is a translation method, which can be made against the study of cognates and synonyms. Just as in the study of cognates it is necessary to understand the simpler principles which underlie their formation, so in the study of derivatives, the methods and rules should be fairly well understood.

The importance of derivatives in the study of languages has been variously treated. The layman's idea is probably based on Mark Twain's assertion that—

with a vocabulary consisting of the words *Zug*, *Schlag*, and *also*, one can get along very well in Germany. In the dictionary there are three columns of compounds with the second alone, beginning with *Schlagader*, which means artery, and going clear through the alphabet to *Schlagwasser*, which means bilgewater. But that thing which it does not mean has not yet been discovered.

This indicates in an exaggerated way what has been aptly called "the pictorial quality" of the German language, and to what an extent and with what facility this language lends itself to composition; still I am inclined to think that the genial Mark Twain has not overstated the matter very much. After being asked to discuss this subject, I made it a point to check up one of these words, namely, *ziehen*, limiting the compounds, first, to those in which some form of the word was the first component, and second, to those in which the composition was with one of the inseparable prefixes, or the three commonly given groups of prepositions. Of the first sort there were 90, of the second 171, or a total of 261, and the search was not at all thorough. If now nouns and verbs and other parts of speech had also been

taken, I feel certain the number would have exceeded 400, perhaps 500. Not all words may form compounds so freely, but possibly there are others from which even more may be formed.

Approaching the same question from a different standpoint, five texts in common use were taken and the vocabularies were searched for examples. In each case the words were chosen haphazard, and the results averaged as follows: *Immensee*, 10 words, an average of 4.9 derivatives to each word; *Höher als die Kirche*, 10 words, average 8.2; *Das kalte Herz*, 70 words, average 4; *Glück auf*, 50 words, average 7.2; *Der zerbrochene Krug*, 30 words, average 7.6. The last results were obtained by a class of fifteen third-year pupils, who were given a few examples, as *schreiben*, *Schrift*, *schriftlich*, *Vorschrift*, and asked to take two words each. Only one word was found without any derivative. Occasionally they were led into error, as when, for instance, they derived *Finger* from *fangen*, an error, however, which eminent philologists seem also to have made.

Another test was on the ability of the student to form derivatives from his own vocabulary. The problem selected was to form feminine abstracts from adjectives, as *kalt*, *die Kälte*. In no case were there less than eight found and in several cases almost twice that number.

But the purpose of studying derivatives and composites, I take it, is not so much to enable the pupil to form them for himself, as to aid him in recognizing them when found in the text. As already stated in the beginning, some of the underlying principles should be understood, and for this purpose the roots or primitive parts of the language, and some of the methods of compounding and varying these, may briefly be given.

There are two general methods, which may be termed "external" and "internal." Derivatives formed by the first method are comparatively, but only comparatively, rare, most of them falling into the second class.

INTERNAL CHANGES

These may be grouped under two heads (the third, reduplication, having practically been lost): 1, *Ablaut*; 2, Change of

root consonant. Under *Ablaut*, again, may be considered a number of cases, some of which, however, are covered in part by consonant changes or composition. These subheads, with illustrations under each, are:

1. Formation of diminutives, requiring the *Umlaut*, as: *Knabe, Knäblein; Haus, Häuschen*.

2. Abstract substantives, formed also by the *Umlaut*, as: *gut, Güte; warm, Wärme*.

3. Feminine sex names ending in *-in*, as: *Wolf, Wölfin; Bauer, Bäuerin*.

4. Nouns ending in *er*, formed from verbs, as: *tragen Träger, backen, Bäcker*.

5. Derivative adjectives, ending in *-ig, -isch, -icht, -lich*, etc., as: *Gunst, günstig; Tor, tönicht*, etc.

6. Inflectional forms as formed in

a) Declension of nouns, as: *Vater, väterlich*.

b) Comparison of adjectives, as: *alt, älter, ällich*.

c) Conjugation of strong verbs, as: *helfen, hilfst, Hilfe*.

7. The collective idea expressed by the prefix *ge-*, as: *Busch, Gebüsch; wachsen, Gewächs*.

Examples under each of these might be multiplied indefinitely, but it must not be forgotten that many derivatives will not fall into any of these groups.

CHANGE OF CONSONANTS

These may be of two sorts, either change in value, or change in position.

Change of position is illustrated by the forms, *Brunnen, Bronn, Born*.

A change of value is usually accompanied by a change of meaning, as in: *Rabe, Rappe, beissen, beizen*.

COMPOSITION

As already stated, this is the most fruitful source of derivatives, but there is actually less variety about it. There are two sorts, real and unreal. In real composition the first component is uninflected as: *Landmann, Himmelbett*. In the unreal the first component is inflected as *Landsmann, Herrenhaus*.

This topic, if gone into in detail, would fill volumes, and only a few cases can be treated here. Taking the verb *sehen* as an example and using the inseparable prefixes, adverbs, and prepositions only, we have, to give merely a partial list: *ansehen*, (verb and noun), *Ansicht*, *aussehen* (verb and noun), *Aussicht*, *aufsehen* (verb and noun), *Aufsicht*, *besehen*, *durchsehen*, *Durchsicht*, *durchsichtig*, *gesehen*, *Gesicht*, *Angesicht*, *hinsehen*, *Hinsicht*, *hinsichtlich*, *einsehen*, *Einsicht*, *nachsehen*, *Nachsicht*, *übersehen*, *Uebersicht*, *vorsehen*, *Vorsicht*, *vorsichtig*, *versehen*, *Versehen*, *unversehens*, *Wiedersehen*, etc.

The meanings of the prefixes and suffixes, in so far as they have any meaning at present, may be studied to some advantage. The noun suffix *-ei*, for instance, has two quite general meanings, first: a business or the place of business, as illustrated in: *Bäckerei*, *Druckerei*, *Fischerei*, *Gerberei*, etc.; second, an action long continued, perhaps to the point of monotony, as *Schreiberei*, *Schmeichelei*, etc.

I should like to mention two further aids, although these are open to the objection that they are translation methods. The first is to call attention to the similarity of some of the compounds in German and English, as for instance: *zorn-ig* = ang(e)r-y; *un-glücklich* = un-lucky; *männ-lich* = manly; *kind-isch* = child-ish; *Vor-sicht* = fore-sight.

The second is to emphasize the equivalence of Latin and German composites, and as examples of such a few must suffice, as: *Aus-druck* = ex-pression; *Vor-sicht* = pro-vidence; *über-setzen* = trans-late; *unter-schreiben* = sub-scribe; *Für-sprecher* = ad-vocate.

Illustrations of the last two points could be indefinitely multiplied, but to no purpose. The point is, it seems to me, that in the hands of a teacher who can restrain his own enthusiasm for the subject, and can make the acquisition of a vocabulary by all these methods a means to an end, the plan discussed might prove a blessing to pupils who have in the past learned their vocabularies, as Mark Twain played the violin, "by ear and main strength."